

November 26, 2003

Art Anderson, Chair and Patricia Decker, Project Director
Waterfront Futures Group
1801 Roeder Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Art and Patricia:

I was pleased to attend another very productive WFG meeting last Friday. I agreed with the enthusiastic comments of the members regarding the DAT presentation and also, regretfully, with their less positive reactions to the presentations by the two Waterfront Center consultants, Ann Breen and Dick Rigby. Here is a summary of my thoughts on two issues which our visitors raised and on two that went unmentioned. Hopefully, they will supply some fresh insights regarding our stewardship of the shoreline and reinforce other perceptions that have already emerged from your extensive data collecting.

1. Sadly, Ann and Dick offered more analysis than synthesis, although you provided reams of Bellingham data in advance. Happily, the DAT later opened the window on synthesis by identifying the bay's two, contrasting natural settings and its three, distinct view perspectives. Another outstanding feature is the sandstone bluff that originally marked most of our shoreline. The bluff defines two natural venues, the expansive shoreline and the seclusive upland. It also potentiates making meaningful transitions from one to the other, both physically and emotionally.

Over time, the residential, commercial and institutional development of Bellingham spread along the top of the bluff while the shoreline below it was extended outward through a series of landfills to create the industrial space we now call the "working waterfront." Our shoreline design concept should focus on maximizing the palpable experiences of being at the top of the bluff or at the bottom and the anticipation of moving up to one venue or down to the other. This will require striking an appropriate balance of natural and man-made exposures on each level.

2. Unfortunately, neither the consultants nor the DAT mentioned the spectacular social, cultural and economic benefits that other cities have achieved by launching concerted efforts to reclaim their respective waterfronts. These precedents provide tangible motivations for community-wide acceptance of the WFG's final recommendations and support for their approval by the City and the Port. Public showings of a film like, *Back From The Brink*, could help to publicize the results to be enjoyed from implementing the plans created by your diligent efforts.
3. Another area omitted by our visitors is the need to redefine the key land use terms, "highest and best" and "marine-related." The shoreline belongs to all of us, especially in Fairhaven, where the entire waterfront south of Reid Boiler Works is owned by the Port as public trustee. Waterfront sites should be valued first for the potential to enhance community enjoyment and then for their income producing possibilities. Bellingham's essential appeal stems from its small-city character and its unique location that facilitates ready access to both the water and

the mountains. If we approach shoreline stewardship solely out of the desire for financial gain, we risk diminishing the very quality of life that we prize so highly. We customarily distinguish between uses that are marine-dependent and those that are not and call the second type “marine-related.” We reason that, while uses of the first type should remain by the water, uses of the second type can and should be relocated inland to make their present shoreline sites more economically viable. The replacements tend to be urban uses of greater height and density, not intended to increase public access to or from the water. In fact, these subsequent developments often block public access, both visually and physically.

The term “marine-related” should be understood more appropriately as covering both types of use, with the second subcategory broadened to include any use that encourages and facilitates public enjoyment of the shoreline from the water and/or from the land. Under this definition, businesses like Arrowac Fisheries, LFS Trawl, Staaf Sails and Unicraft should be kept on the waterfront to provide a tangible connection with our marine heritage and an appreciation of the contribution each kind of activity makes to our present-day enjoyment of marine activities.

4. Dick Rigby’s stress on the need for creating an implementation vehicle resonated deeply with me, as did Craig Cole’s similar, and more insightful, proposal at the WFG meeting on July 11th. The genius of Dick’s concept is broadening the sponsor-base to include the Lummi Nation and WWU. (Adding the Nooksacks and citizen stakeholders is also advisable) The genius of Craig’s idea is establishing the implementation vehicle while the planning process is under way so that the tandem operation will ensure realization of positive and concrete results.

In my letter to Ann and Dick, a copy of which I e-mailed to you and Allison, I commended them for stressing the implementation issue and suggested adding two coordinators to the present staff rather than setting up a separate entity. You and Allison have done a superlative job in orchestrating the planning phase. Who could better qualify to guide the implementation efforts? With a couple of early staff additions, the productive transition Craig envisioned could be achieved with few structural adjustments, little loss of time and minimum budgetary increases.

The work schedule that the WFG has set for itself over the next three months is right on target! Continuing to encourage community input is strategic, especially after the public rollout of your initial report in February. Since time constraints prevented our neighborhood representatives from covering our entire list of concerns and concepts with either visiting contingent, an expanded version of the list will be reviewed during December by our eight Southside groups and the owners of key business in the FMIP. Then it will be offered as a contribution to the deliberations that the WFG is planning to hold in January.

Sincerely and hopefully yours,

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Ideas for Futures Group Consideration
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